

# AMERICAN SCIENCE FIGHTS DREAD TYPHUS IN SERBIA

## Invitation to Gen. Gorgas to Take Up the Work Recalls Medicine's Long "Honor Roll" of Martyrs

THE death of two American physicians from typhus fever in Serbia was not the first toll that this disease has taken among American doctors who have defied its dangers. An equally tragic chapter in the history of the malady was written when three men from the United States contracted the disease in Mexico five years ago and only one of them lived. But that tragedy brought back the secret of typhus and pointed out the way to suppress it. The best known perhaps of American surgeons, Gen. William Crawford Gorgas, Surgeon-General of the army, is now planning to resign his post that he may grapple with the disease in Serbia.

But what may be done in Serbia will be largely based on what was done in Mexico in 1909. When three expeditions of American doctors went to the sister republic to the south in that year that they might study typhus at first hand and learn its secrets, they had no way of foreseeing the effect that their findings would have on the saving of thousands of lives in the future. Yet these men solved the problem of determining just what the disease is and how it is transmitted. They had the knowledge, based on the work of Dr. E. P. Magruder and Dr. J. F. Donnelly, who were going when death stopped their work in Serbia. Upon that knowledge will be based whatever Gen. Gorgas and the Rockefeller Foundation may do hereafter.

Typhus fever has ravaged many countries at various times since history began to be recorded and has been called by many names in many places. It has been called ship fever and has run through many a vessel's company. As prison fever it has resulted in the death of many thousands of soldiers in all the wars that have led to the holding of great numbers of captives. Libya prison in the civil war knew it well, and a brother of George Washington died of it in the Revolution.

As jail fever it has been known to many a sheriff throughout the United States. As Brill's disease it has, within the last decade, attracted more or less attention in New York city. Yet in all these masquerades it was a complaint that was variously confused with typhoid and with spotted fever and with many other ailments.

The identity of typhus with Brill's disease was discovered only about a year ago by Dr. Harry Plotz, a young bacteriologist, not yet twenty-five years old, connected with Mount Sinai Hospital. Because of the premature publication of his discovery he was not permitted to attend the annual meeting of the medical science has now hailed him as the first to isolate the germ of typhus. Dr. Hans Zinsser, the eminent bacteriologist of Columbia, who is now on his way to Serbia as a member of the Rockefeller expedition to study typhus, was inoculated with the Plotz serum just before his departure. The effect in his case will be keenly watched by physicians all over the world.

Since the Spanish-American war the American physician has been solving many of the baffling problems of health. Carroll and Lazear discovered contracted yellow fever and Carroll survived it with the secret of its transmission. Maus fought Asiatic cholera and bubonic plague in the Philippines. Ashford discovered the bookworm that was devastating Porto Rico and pointed out its cure. Russell has done much to conquer typhoid. In 1909 three separate parties of American physicians undertook to investigate the causes of typhus and to discover a remedy.

There was an expedition from the University of Chicago headed by Dr. Howard T. Hackett, who contracted the disease and died. There was a second expedition from the University of Ohio and of Dr. Coniff caught typhus and failed to survive it. The third expedition was composed of two Americans, Dr. Joseph Goldberger, Dr. Goldberger got typhus, but survived. He is still a member of the Public Health Service, and a *Sun* correspondent called on him in Washington last week and asked him to tell about typhus.

Dr. Goldberger is a great, strapping, curly haired man who always smiles. He came near death when he contracted yellow fever in the South. A little later he fell a victim to dengue. Typhoid he had survived and there was a hope that he would make him immune from typhus. Later he has been working with pellagra, and his associates say that the fact that he has not taken it proves that it is not contagious.

"We were a bit jealous," said Dr. Goldberger, "when we found other expeditions in Mexico studying typhus. We maintained an outward show of neutrality, but each party was afraid the other might solve the puzzle first."

We found plenty of typhus. There is always typhus in Mexico or in any other city where people huddle together and are unclean. It is a disease that is characterized by a roaring hot fever. There is a rash and that is all. It is like typhoid in many ways, but develops much more quickly and results in a fatality or a recovery in half the time.

"The typhus we found in Mexico was in the crowded, dirty quarters. It has always been so—schools, prisons, jails, camps. We had recently proved that the tick transmitted the spotted fever of the Rocky Mountains. The mosquito in yellow fever, the flea in bubonic plague, the housefly in typhoid—these were fresh in the medical mind. We were considering the insect that would probably be present under the conditions under which typhus had always developed. Those conditions were always such that the grayback, or body louse, might be expected. We looked for this creature first in the cases we examined in Mexico city and always found it."

"We were prepared for experiments to prove or disprove the theory of this insect transmitting the disease. We had taken to Mexico with us a cage of monkeys. The monkey will catch almost any disease that man will, and for this reason is of great value in such experiments. Though there may be justification for disclaiming relationship with these animals, that relationship has served a good purpose in such experiments."

"We took insects from the bodies of people who were badly affected, kept them in little glass bottles until they were hungry and released them upon the monkeys. In nearly every case the monkey soon came down with the fever. By such repetition we were able to prove that the disease was so transmitted."

"Later we were able to prove the immunity of the monkeys that had once been affected. Then we were able to prove that they were not immune from typhoid and from spotted fever, thus establishing the fact that these were distinct diseases."

"Why is it?" Dr. Goldberger was asked, "that physicians and nurses so often contract a disease like typhus when they know absolutely the method of its transmission?"

"It is humanly impossible to be careful enough to avoid it," he said. "You work for twelve or fifteen hours a day among people who are full of this contagion. You take every precaution that is possible. But sooner or later one of the insects, so small that it cannot be seen, probably, will be brushed into your clothing, and there you are. It is not therefore surprising that three out of the four Red Cross surgeons in Serbia should have become affected and that three-fourths of the nurses should come down with the disease."

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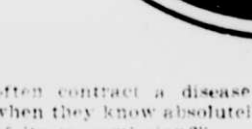
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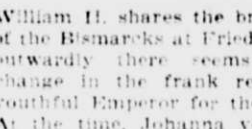
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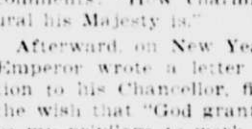
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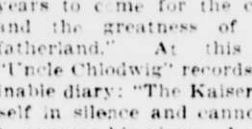
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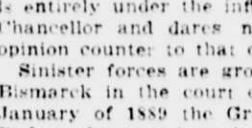
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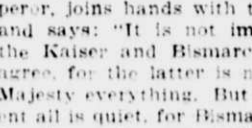
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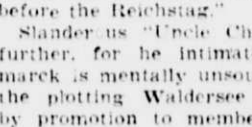
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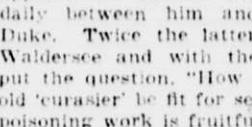
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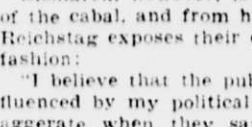
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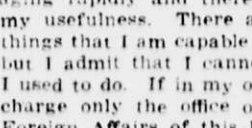
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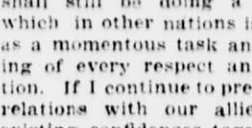
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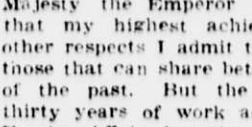
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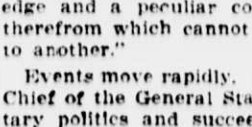
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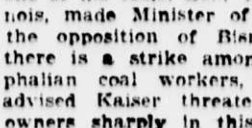
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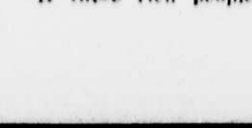
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## Two Physicians Already Added There to the Toll of Death Suffered by Our Doctors in Combating Disease

here of people huddled together in concentration camps. There is probably little opportunity for bathing or for the washing of clothes. The "land that knew no beggars" now knows little else than tragedy.

A land of small farms owned by the people who cultivated them, Serbia has contributed all her able-bodied men to her defense. This is the war that has gone before. A great portion of the country has been swept by the enemy, and the inhabitants, old men, women and children, have been crowded from their homes and into the concentration camps. There is little food, no money to rehabilitate them, no means of their getting back to their former productiveness.

What the problems are that must be met in Serbia are known in their entirety to nobody in America. If they are and taken by Gen. Gorgas they will be in the hands of the man who has earned the reputation of being the greatest sanitarian in the world. He it was who made the first fight against yellow fever after the theory of its transmission by the mosquito was demonstrated.

It was in Cuba in 1901 that he inaugurated the first campaign against